

Brain Injury Association of America Offers Tips on Advocacy

Writing Letters to Congress

Letter writing is still one of the most effective means of advocating for a particular issue, policy or piece of legislation or to just voice your opinion to your representatives. You can also communicate via regular or email.

To get started, visit the Brain Injury Association of America's website, Legislative Action Center and enter your zip code: <http://capwiz.com/bia/home/>

Tips for Writing to Your Representative

When writing a letter, remember that letters should:

- * Be short and address one issue.
- * Be to the point and no longer than one page.
- * Present the purpose at the beginning of the letter.
- * Identify the legislation by name (e.g. TBI Act); if applicable: House bill=H.R. _____. or Senate bill=S._____.
- * Personalized by stating how the issue or brain injury impacts you, your family members, patients/clients and your/their lives.
- * Present the basic facts.
- * Be relevant to your community. (If possible, include statistics about the population represented in your state or district). If this information is not available, use national information such as overall incidence of brain injuries, fatalities, falls, motor vehicles crashes, emergency visits, hospitalizations, etc. (See CDC fact sheet.)
- * Be typed or handwritten.

Contacting Your Federal Representatives via Email

You may determine who your representatives are by visiting:

- * Congress: www.visi.com/juan/congress/
- * Thomas: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>
- * Project Vote Smart: www.vote-smart.org

When you contact your representative:

- * State who you are and your purpose.
- * Be brief, clear and specific.
- * Speak from personal experience, but also support your cause with facts.
- * State the advantages and relevancy of your cause.
- * Provide a fact sheet highlighting the major facts.
- * Address your letter using the appropriate title. Elected officials are addressed as "The Honorable" before their title and full name.

United State Representative

The Honorable <<Full name>>

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative <<Last name>>:

United States Senator

The Honorable <<Full name>>

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator <<Last name>>:

When You Telephone Your Representative

- * Call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask for your Representative or Senator's office.
- * When calling, first be sure you are connected to the appropriate office and then identify yourself, noting that you are a constituent. State and local officials may answer the phone, however, when calling federal officials, you will want to ask for the aid responsible for the issue you would like to discuss.
- * If the purpose of your call is to state your position, identify the bill, and indicate if you support or oppose it.
- * Be prepared to support your position with accurate, current and comprehensive information. Be concise and use understandable language.
- * Be persistent. You may request a written response to your call, and be sure to follow-up with a letter or visit.

Contacting the President of the United States

The Honorable <<Full name>>

President of the United States

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

Making Visits to Government Officials

When visiting your representative, you can be most effective if you prepare for the visit. Learn as much as you can about the issue prior to the meeting and take all supporting materials with you. Practice a short presentation, highlighting the important points, and have a fact sheet prepared that you may leave with your representative that summarizes the information. When you are well informed, your representative will more likely take note of your position and may even consider you as a resource and expert when studying or presenting an issue or bill.

It is possible to visit representatives during sessions in their offices; however, you may be more likely to get their attention at other times when they are back in their states/districts. Be aware that an appointment will be necessary. This can be done with the appointment secretary or administrative assistant. Be clear about the purpose of your visit, and be sure to arrive on time. Most visits will be scheduled for 5-10 minutes.

Make the connection between your issue and/or position and the interests of the representative's constituency. State the relevancy and advantage of supporting your cause. "Please support this bill because it will help persons/constituents... recover from brain injury."

Be persistent and be sure to:

- Follow-up all letters, calls, and visits with thank-you notes and more calls, letters and visits!
- Make a commitment to your cause.
- Include your public officials on your mailing list. Continue to send information, articles, newsletters and letters of support.

Public officials respond to people, particularly their constituents. Your vote counts!